Scarred and Left Me, Like a Sunburn

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Scarred and Left Me, Like a Sunburn

by collapseofjune

Summary

Nigel aches for Will, his childhood best friend, and there isn't much he can do about it.

Notes

This is Part 2. of "Your Type of Mind, so Hard to Find"
You should read part 1 first <3

Title from Ed Sheeran's song Sunburn.

Thank you to my friend Heron for correcting and suffering with me <3

The dogs run through the soft cover of snow that fell on Wolf Trap last night. The light of dawn paints the scene in a gold glow. Will is running with one of the dogs, Buster, and laughs; happy to be around his pack. That's the way Nigel wants to remember him. Carefree, joyful, bright.

Happy.

Nigel approaches him slowly, leaving boot imprints in the frozen soil.
Mornings don't agree with him, but he had to see Will one last time, before he left.

Will finally notices him, when Winston runs towards Nigel, tennis ball in mouth. Nigel greets him with a pat on the head and grabs the wet ball to toss it for the excited dog to retrieve.

"Hey!" Will's smile widens. He never fails to take Nigel's breath away. His hair is longer, curls cascading past the back of his neck. He's a beauty out of a Cabanel painting.

"Hey, pup."

Will usually huffs, annoyed at the nickname. But not this time. The smile Nigel loves so much vanishes from Will's face as he meets him halfway. Having him so close after not seeing him for months makes his heart ache.

After the dinner party at Hannibal's house, Nigel had declined every single one of Will's subsequent invitations. Even the ones that didn't involve Hannibal. He told himself that if he put distance between them, his feelings would fade. Who is he kidding? He's been in love with him for thirty years. The only way to stop hurting, even a little bit, is to try to forget him.

"What is it?" Will's tone is worried. He always saw right through him. He likes to think Will had a lot of practice deciphering people's emotions and intentions with Nigel as a guinea pig. Nigel is not easy to read for anyone else.

Will doesn't wait for Nigel to answer. He calls for his dog to go back inside.
"Come in, I'll make coffee."

Nigel shakes his head. "I can't. I've got a plane to catch."

"What time?"

He thinks of lying, of telling him he must leave immediately. But Will deserves some truths today. Just not all of them.

"Tonight."

Will huffs in amusement and tilts his head towards the house, urging Nigel to follow him. Nigel wishes he could turn on his heels and sprint to his car. He's not sure he'll be able to keep his feelings from coming out — his guts spilling out to the floor.

Will sets down two black coffees on his coffee table and sits next to him on the couch. Buster lays his head on Nigel's lap, enjoying the head scritches.

After taking a sip from his mug and setting it back down, Will asks:

"Where are you going?"

Nigel takes a deep breath. Under the smell of winter air, pine trees and roasted coffee, he can smell Will's natural scent: a comforting, warm smell that has followed Nigel almost his whole life. His throat constricts as he represses the need to cry.

"Romania."

"For how long?"

Nigel swallows hard, taking his time to answer.
"For good."

Will lets out a short laugh. Not from amusement, but from indignation.

"You've barely even talked to me in the last six months and-" Will is getting angry, volume rising, "-and now you just fucking leave? You've been distant for longer than that, too. Ever since…"

Nigel doesn't meet his eyes once, only focused on the feel of Buster's fur.

"Are you in love with me?" Will asks, barely above a whisper, like he's afraid to be overheard by an omnipresent god.

Nigel scoffs. It only took Will thirty fucking years to get it. Well, Nigel didn't help his case: being such a fucking coward. He should have confessed to him, when they had left prom early to hang out in a fast-food parking lot. He should have told him on one of their horror movie nights. He should have asked him to be his boyfriend after one of their late-night drives; Hundreds of wasted opportunities because Nigel has been nothing but a fucking coward.

"Ever since you broke my nose, yeah." He turns his gaze to Will to see him look back with glistening eyes. Nigel continues. "Do you remember that night at Rico's bar? I think it was Phil's birthday, I don't fucking know, because that wasn't the important part. Your hair was long, like it is now." He wants to reach out and play with the curl behind Will's ear but stops himself. "You looked beautiful. You always did. You always do. I kissed you. I thought you'd push me back, that you'd be upset, or that you'd think it was a joke." He looks at Will's lips. As pink as they'd always been. "But you kissed me back. And you never brought it up again, and neither did I. And I regret it."

“You think leaving is the solution to that?”

“What other fucking options do I have?!” Anger and sadness have always been inseparable for Nigel.

Buster jumps off the couch.

Will stays silent. They both do. For what seems like an eternity.

“The nachos were terrible. It was two pieces of American cheese on cardboard-tasting tortilla chips, mushy tomato cubes, and one singular black olive,” Will chuckles and Nigel can’t help but smile, even with the way his soul hurts.
“But you still ate all of it,” Will continues “I still think of those times when we’d ask for ‘one singular black olive’ when we ordered nachos, no matter where we were. It’s stupid, but it always made me laugh.” He exhales. “And I still think of the kiss. More often than I’d like. More often than is appropriate.”

Nigel looks at him with a frown and dares to hope. “Even now?”

Will bridges the space between them and puts a hand on his cheek, rubbing his thumb against his cheekbone. Will closes his eyes, long lashes on soft porcelain skin, and brushes his lips against his.
Nigel sighs against his mouth, heart twisting painfully. He brings his hand to the back of Will’s neck, threading his fingers through soft curls and pulls him into a kiss.

Nigel kisses him fervently, like he’s starving. Because he has been.
Will deepens the kiss, licking his way into his friend’s mouth. Nigel’s grip in his hair tightens and Will makes the most beautiful noise he has ever heard. They savor this moment like it’s going to slip away at any moment. Because it will.

“Stay…” Will whispers against his cheek when they break the kiss.

“Do you love him?”

Will meets his eyes and nods. “I do.”

Nigel knew – knows, that Will loves Hannibal. They understand each other. They spout philosophy in front of fireplaces in expensive leather chairs, with even more expensive wine in hand. Hannibal is sophisticated hedonism personified. He’s a renaissance man; versed in medicine, music, and the culinary arts. He accepts the darkest parts of Will that Nigel can’t quite swallow. He can see why Will wants him. He’s a dream, for him. Nigel only wishes Will would pick reality. But he’s made his choice.

“Then I have to leave.”

Nigel has to forget him. It will hurt to remember the past thirty years and try to erase every memory of chocolate curls and blue eyes. Eventually he’ll forget the sound of his voice, the ring of his laugh, and how his eyes almost close fully when he does. He’ll forget his smell

and the placements of his birthmarks. He'll say he got the scar on his nose from a bar fight. He'll try to convince himself, in the process, that Will Graham never existed. Maybe he'll find peace. Maybe he'll forever wander the earth with a piece of his heart chewed off.

Will follows him to the front door. Nigel left his mug of coffee in the living room, untouched.

"Call when you land?"

Nigel thinks of lying again, of telling him he will. He doesn't have the energy to keep secrets. Not anymore.

"I won't."

He looks back at Will after putting his leather coat back on. He looks deeply hurt, like Nigel is the one ripping his heart apart.

"Ni…" His voice quivers.

Nigel gently pushes a curl behind Will's ear and lowers his head to kiss him, one last time. He pulls back and gives Will a small nod as a goodbye.

Golden light spills through the entrance when Nigel opens the front door to leave. He looks back to see Will, illuminated in the glow of the sun. The tears rolling down his cheeks glimmer.

Looking at Will for the last time, well, it feels like getting gutted.

That's not how Nigel wants to remember this. He wishes he'd have had a better poker face. If he did, maybe he could have played with Will and the dogs in the snow instead. Maybe he could have made him laugh and smile. He could have remembered him differently.

Happy.

Will runs after Nigel's car as he backs off into the dirt road. He catches it in time to open the passenger's door, crawling inside when Nigel abruptly hits the breaks. Will basically throws himself onto him, kissing him again, desperate. His face is wet from crying, and so is Nigel's. He wraps his arms around Will's waist and brings him impossibly closer, like he's trying to merge their souls together. They both cry in the kiss, clinging to each other like the other will slip away.
Because Nigel will.

Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?

Nigel's not quite sure.

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